

# The Builder.

No. CCLXVI.

SATURDAY, MARCH 11, 1848.



THE exhibition of recent British manufactures, which has been opened this week at the Society of Arts in the Adelphi, will be found more satisfactory than the first, and gives evidence, still small though it may be, of the employment of good art for every-day purposes.\* It must not be regarded as even an approach to a representation of what the kingdom can do,—there is not room in the apartments for other than a certain class of examples, and some manufacturers require to see very clearly the advantage of sending specimens of their productions for exhibition before they can be led to do so; they do not like the trouble, or begrudge the cost of carriage, and some few have a notion of keeping things to themselves! They do not understand that "there is that scattereth and yet increaseth,—and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty." This, however, does not lessen the praise which is due to the Society of Arts for these exhibitions, and for the other steps they have taken for promoting the application of the arts to the improvement of the manufactures of the country. The exhibition will grow, and if the society succeed in an object they have now in view, the exhibition will become NATIONAL, and fairly represent British industry and taste.

A rock on which the project may strike may be just dimly seen below water by the observant visitor on the present occasion: it is inscribed *clique*,—but as we would say nothing to discourage, and certainly nothing that might be construed into fault-finding, we will simply bid the pilot look out ahead. have no object in view but the port of General Good, and the voyage will not fail to be both pleasant and prosperous.

The manufacturers who have contributed on the present occasion are seventy in number, and we would especially direct attention to Minton's tile pavings, Jordan's machine-carvings, and the Coalbrookdale iron-castings.

The new scheme of the Society of Arts already referred to, and relative to which the council have attended the Board of Trade, is,—That the places where Schools of Design are established, should, in rotation, have the advantage and use of the collection made in London every year by the society; and to do this, the society suggest that the manufacturers and proprietors of the chief specimens should deliver them over to the council of the Schools of Design, to be sent for gratuitous exhibition to the students and public generally each year, in such provincial schools as the council may think fit. The council urge as a reason for the step, that the students in Government Schools of Design throughout the country, should be rendered familiar with the most recent works in art and manufactures; that the manufacturers, who must be the future employers of these students, should be more closely connected with them; and the public taste im-

proved, for the due appreciation of their joint productions.

They further propose, with the co-operation of the Board of Trade, that the Society of Arts shall, every fourth year, make a collected exhibition of the principal subjects exhibited in the previous three years, and of others expressly prepared for the special purpose; and that such national exhibition shall take place in some large building purposely provided, if not at the cost of the Government, at least with the Government sanction. And they suggest that the site which offers the greatest advantages for such a building (to be of a temporary character) would be Trafalgar-square,—considering that it affords abundant space, and a provision of water for specimens and models best exhibited in connection with water; and offers facilities for a structure of economical character, inasmuch as there is already a good pavement, and three sides more or less available in a building for such temporary purpose.

Government sanction to the erection of such a building would have to be obtained; but they say, if there should be any reluctance on the part of Government to undertake the risk of the structure, it is believed that other responsible parties might be found to do so. The admission to the exhibition to be partly free and partly by payment; and the receipts to be applied, in the first instance, to the payment of expenses incurred in forming it; in paying for the honorary medals and rewards to be distributed to artists, manufacturers, and art-workmen, and for forming a fund for future exhibitions.

As we long ago urged the advantage of such an exhibition, it is scarcely necessary for us to say that the proposal has our hearty concurrence.

Would that we could make more rapid progress in the production of designers, or, at all events, in the artistic instruction of the public, than is now the case! But those who should guide the movement flounder sadly: in some cases absurdly interfering in matters out of their province, and which they understand not; and in others countenancing the weakest productions and the most inefficient arrangements. We can illustrate this assertion on the instant, by reference to the first part of "Ornamental Designs for Decoration and Manufactures, published under the authority of the Government School of Design," of which, luckily, only a few copies are yet issued.

It appears from a report of the council that good copies of decorations being needed for the provincial schools, Herr L. Gruner was selected to prepare and publish such a work in ten parts, each containing six plates (afterwards arranged to be in 20 parts, each containing 6 plates), at a price not exceeding one guinea each part. To shew the importance of producing a standard work on ornament, the council observe—

"that the taste for decorative design, in all its various branches, is greatly increasing in this country; that none doubt the commercial value of art to every species of our ornamental manufactures; and that, in the absence of good works on ornament, published in this country, many foreign cheap publications of objectionable quality are imported, and are eagerly sought for and purchased by manufacturers and artisans; so that already in their productions there is perceptible a baneful influence, which the council believe would be remedied by a liberal diffusion of the work now projected, inasmuch as it would serve extensively to promote the cultivation of correct taste, by putting into the hands of practical

designers numerous examples of the highest excellence.

From the careful study of these copies of original examples, and the explanations with which they will be accompanied, will be derived the means of invention, and ultimately the power to produce original designs; for the council feel assured that, for the education of designers of ornament, the proper course is first to present for study *examples classically excellent*, from which the principles of ornamental art may be deduced.

The council cannot conclude this report without repeating the expression of their conviction that the work which they recommend to be undertaken, will be found to be an important instrument for the promotion of correct taste, and will be highly useful to the numerous industrial classes for whose special benefit it is designed. That there is great want of such a publication in this country is fully demonstrated by the number of foreign works imported. They would further observe that, although the estimated amount of expense may be deemed large,\* it has been, on due deliberation, considered essential; and that, if schools of design under the sanction of Government are to be maintained, they trust they may be enabled to produce such works of instruction as are necessary to ensure to their operations a high character and beneficial results."

In consequence of this report, the subject was referred by the Committee of Privy Council for Trade to the Lords of the Treasury, and the publication of the work was sanctioned by the Government.

The work being required for such a purpose, so heralded, produced under such authority, and apparently considered beyond the capabilities of an Englishman,† we naturally expected would be a first-rate production, calculated to exercise a beneficial and lasting influence on decorative art in this country. What is the fact? The first number is now before us: it contains the following plates (each 24 inches by 20 inches):—1. The Roman Doric order (2); 2. Tarsia, or inlaid wood, fifteenth century. Fra Giovanni; 3. Richly chased arms, historical museum at Dresden; 4. Painted arch round a tabernacle, by Luini; 5. Ancient painted frieze, from Pompeii; 6. The marble room, Palazzo del T. at Mantua (ascribed to) G. Romano; 7. Detail of parts of the principal frieze of ditto; and, 8. Ornaments in chiaro-scuro at the Academy at Venice; and we have no hesitation in saying, it is discreditable to all concerned. So far from its diffusion being likely to remedy "the baneful influence" spoken of by the council; so far from affording excellent examples "from which the principles of ornamental art may be deduced;" so far from being an "important instrument for the promotion of correct taste;" or such a work of instruction as will insure to the operations of Schools of Design "a high character and beneficial results,"—we scruple not to say that the majority of the plates are calculated to produce a bad taste, and do much more harm than good.

Some of the "richly chased arms" might have come from Mexico or the Sandwich Islands; the "ancient painted frieze from Pompeii" is positively detestable; and the decorations of the room said to be painted by G. Romano are so ill designed and so badly drawn (at least in the book before us), that if any master were to place them as copies before his pupils it would be most satisfactory proof of utter unfitness for his office.

Mr. Gruner is himself a good artist, and

\* About 700*l.*, we understand, have been already paid on account of it.

† The only references in the number (on the first plate), are part in French, part in English, viz.—"Names of the members of the board and pedestal;" "names of the members of the establishment;" "names of the members of the capital," &c.

\* The exhibition first opened on Wednesday evening, when Mr. John Bolleson took the chair, and Mr. Scott Russell, the secretary, read an introductory paper.